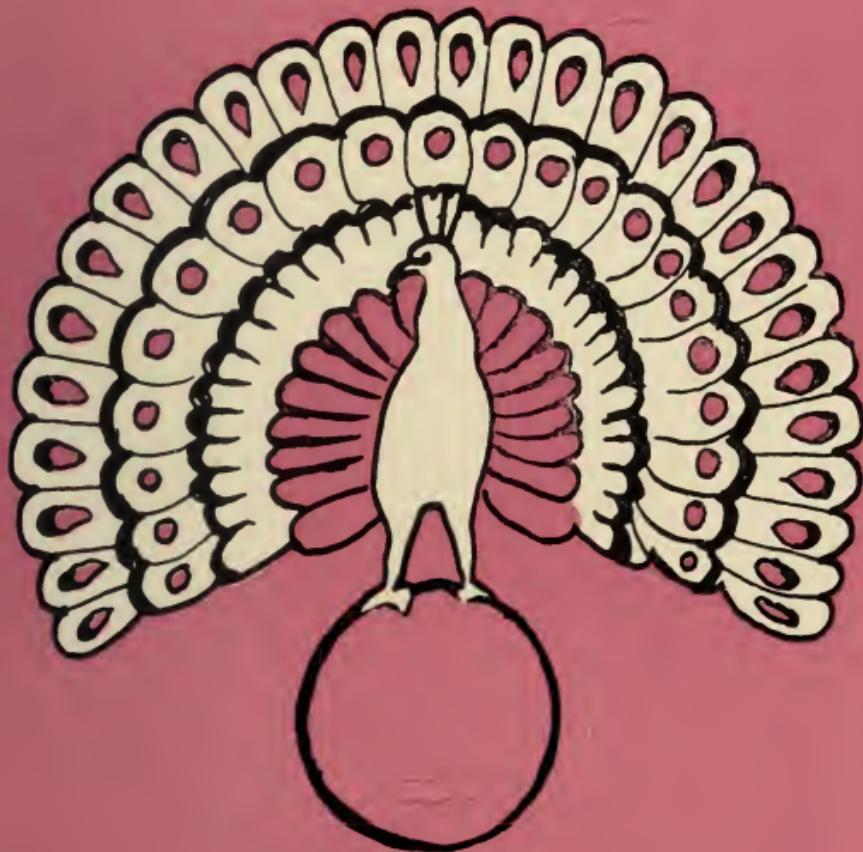


# Easter

A DAY OF VICTORY OVER DEATH



Valentine Long, O. F. M.



ST. ANTHONY'S GUILD  
PATERSON : NEW JERSEY

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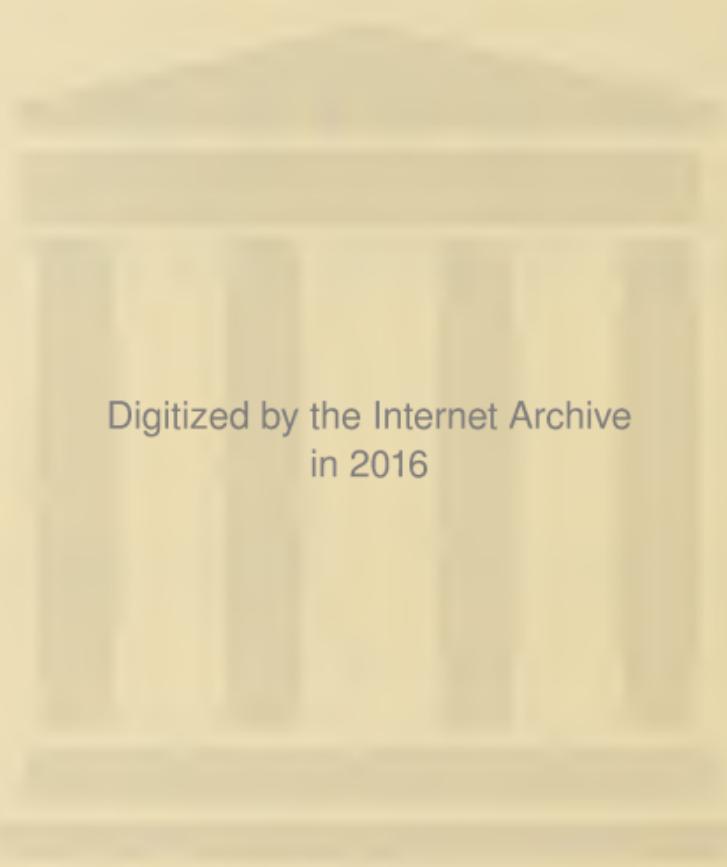
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by

Valentine Long, O. F. M.

ST. ANTHONY'S GUILD  
PATERSON, N. J.

EASTER: A DAY OF VICTORY OVER DEATH

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DEATH, having failed its test when Jesus awakened as from a siesta in the tomb, stands before His majesty forever defeated. The tremendous miracle proves to the ages that He is God and His doctrine the truth; and has become, by the sheer logic of its implications, the very touchstone of the Faith. Saint Paul minces no words about that. Had the Resurrection not taken place after Jesus had predicted it would, the failure would nullify His claim to be divine. Whatever a false prophet is, he cannot be God.

### HISTORY LEAVES NO DOUBT

But it did take place. No fact has been more firmly established in history, by the converging testimony of foe and faithful alike, than the early-morning discovery that the Crucified who had been buried was no longer in the tomb. No other event, certainly, has so affected the world in which Easter shares with Christmas a supremacy among holidays and indeed gives of its splendor to the jubilant observance of the great birthday. Strike Easter from the calendar, and out of Christmas would go all the hope that now sings in a thousand carols.

Let us see why. On Good Friday, thirty-three years after His birth, our lifeless

Saviour was taken down from the cross, then laid securely away in the sepulchre. The hours that followed through the night, and through the next day and the night after that, were filled with anxiety for the apostles, who had (all but John) gone into hiding. Nobody had to warn these men, for they knew from how they felt, that the divinity of their Master was on trial; that that tomb held the answer one way or the other. In fear, they kept out of sight.

But if the apostles feared that Jesus might not arise, the inimical authorities very much feared He would — and with plenty of reason. After all, this Man had wrought indisputable wonders in His lifetime, had died with a deliberate grandeur unheard of before, and besides — had He not served notice that He would break out of the tomb? No chances were to be taken with such a one. Now that they had Him under control at last, they must keep Him there. Accordingly, a huge boulder was rolled against the door of the sepulchre. Hostile soldiers stood guard.

The hours dragg'd.

Then dawned that third day, and lo! the portals of the tomb flashed open as into the morning sunshine, true to His promise, stepped forth the risen Saviour, walking calmly back into the world He had made.

Nails and spear had done their worst, yet here He was at large again, serene and majestic, the omnipotent Conqueror of death. They had buried Him to no avail. His countenance, His five wounds, radiated divinity.

### THE TOMB WAS EMPTY

When the holy women, led by the impetuous Magdalene, arrived on the scene, having discussed on the way how they would manage to remove the heavy stone, they were struck breathless. The stone had been pushed aside; the sepulchre flung open. "Do not be terrified," an angel's voice reassured them. "You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, He is not here. Behold the place where they laid Him."

They looked, and what they saw was the triumphant emptiness of that tomb. Forsaken of Christ, it had promptly become an open reservoir for man's holiest aspirations; a treasure chest of glorious certainty; the reason why, with every return of the great feast of Easter, the Church fills her sanctuaries with the gaiety of music, fragrance and color, a riot of flowers, incense, lighted candles and jubilant Alleluias. It explains why, until the end of time, the generations

will kneel to the question, "Who do you say that I am?" and share with Peter the ageless beauty of the truth, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Our Blessed Lord walked among men, the Answer to their immortal needs. He stood in the Temple, the Fulfillment of the prophets. He demonstrated His omnipotence by miracle after miracle so that faith in Him, our dearest possession on earth, would come easy. He healed the sick of humanly incurable diseases, restored vision to the blind, hearing to the deaf, use of their limbs to the crippled. He commanded the raging winds and sea, and they were calm. Proof after proof sprang from the void of human impossibility, at His most casual command, to proclaim His divinity. Over the plains of Bethlehem the sky had become a miracle of vocal splendor to herald His birth; at Calvary the elements protested the crime of His murder. Quite apart from the super-human endurance, the unexampled grandeur and awfulness of His Passion, this miraculous testimony of land, wave and sky should leave no doubt that His death was like no other among the generations of men: that "truly this Man was the Son of God."

And yet, with all that accumulation of irrefutable proof, what clinches the argument for our Lord's divinity is His Resur-

rection. No matter how impressively He lived or died, life and death are each an experience common to the human race. But who else has ever come back to life, by his own power?

## THOMAS FOUND OUT

So incredible it was until men actually knew it to have happened, that one of His very apostles, who had seen Jesus work miracles daily, could not believe this crowning miracle of all. Thomas, having been absent when the risen Saviour appeared to the other apostles in the upper room, would not take their word for it. "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails," he insisted, "and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Then for a second time, when Thomas was there, the Master stood in their midst. It was a familiar, irresistible voice which Thomas heard inviting him to do what he had demanded to do. He put his finger into the wounded side, touching the Sacred Heart, perceiving at once the error of his doubt; and suddenly he found upon his lips an unpremeditated statement of the truth which has echoed on millions of lips from that time to this. A famous act of faith, an expression of the most beautiful discovery knowable to man, it remains the

surest hope of our war-troubled generation, having indeed cheered the hearts of heroes in foxholes, and sounded to the heavens from rafts and lifeboats on the oceans of the world: "My Lord and my God!"

## SOURCE OF OUR JOY

It is that conviction above every other, beyond a doubt, which has located the sovereign source of human dignity, the spring-head that feeds our innate craving for importance. Unless we feel our significance in life, it is the unanimous verdict of psychiatry, we cannot but lose our savor for life. But you cannot chafe under a sense of frustration if proudly convinced that, had you been there, you could have pointed out the Saviour walking the Galilean roads, and honestly boasted: "There goes the Man who made the oceans, the mountains, the sun and moon and stars — one of *my* kind, who made the angels and all else ever made — and He calls Himself *my Brother!*" You cannot chafe under a sense of frustration if fondly convinced that this omnipotent One partaking of our flesh, identifying Himself with our race, still abides in our midst, and will continue so to abide, as in countless tabernacles around the earth He fulfills His companionable promise: "Behold, I am with

you all days, even unto the consummation of the world." You cannot by the least shade of a possibility chafe under a sense of frustration if unshakably convinced that our dear Lord, having died for you, then rose alive from the tomb to confirm the truth of what He had said so consolingly and with such unmistakable clarity of your own immortality.

And with that—I suppose because of its associability with the matter at hand—I suddenly remember the look I once saw on a mother's face. The mother was plainly losing her son to death; yet one could read in her look the firm conviction that she was *not* losing him from the reach of her prayers. It was a touching manifesto of faith, an announcement upon a human face, that death was only transferring the boy's soul to a higher life—its true home.

### THE MOTHER HAD FAITH

These are the facts. The dying boy had met with an automobile accident and was taken from the wreckage an unconscious mass of flesh and bones. Acquainted with him, as a teacher naturally would be with his pupil, I visited the young sophomore the next day in the hospital, where I found his mother keeping vigil. There were five of

us in the room, as I so vividly recall, but only two counted: the mother and her boy. We other three stood by, in reverence, before the unconscious agony on the bed. Over near the window, worn from hours of sleepless waiting, yet praying her rosary, sat the mother. It was not hard to tell from her hands, from the way they came alive on her lap, from their impulsive reaching out at each new spasm on the bed, that they wanted to fondle her child. Always, however, they returned to the rosary, lingering over every bead, drawing from the Hail Mary some of the sweetness and fortitude of the Mother of God.

Then it happened — something that must forever enrich anyone who witnessed it. At the sound of a sob, a very gentle one, I looked across the room to see, written upon every feature of that mother's face, the beauty of Faith. Saint John once saw it on a Mother's face too. But it doesn't need a saint to feel the force of its charm. . . . How holy grew that room! No one broke silence except rarely, and in whispers.

That was all there was to it — nothing of the dramatic, nothing hysterical — just a facial expression with no language but a sob: a sob trustful and calm with resignation. It arose from an irrepressible grief, but the look which accompanied it told of One

whose love is greater than death is terrifying; of One who had wept with Mary and Martha at a tomb and, in words of omnipotent beauty, affirmed His mastery over death; of One who proved His right to utter that affirmation by immediately calling forth Lazarus alive, and afterwards Himself rising from the sleep of the tomb. "I am," were His divine words, "the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, even if he die, shall live; and whoever lives and believes in Me, shall never die."

Two hours after I left that hospital to return to the college campus where but two days before the boy had been enjoying life, word came that the young sophomore had just died, and that we should not forget him in our prayers. Forget the lad? And with such a mother? Some things are impossible. To remember her courageous sorrow, the glory of the Faith in her tears, is still a lesson to teach of life's essential goodness, despite its many disappointments, its many disillusionments.

She had borne this child into the world only nineteen years before; she was with him now at the end. And throughout the brief interval she instilled in him, by word and example, the highest wisdom man can know: the heavenly doctrines of Jesus Christ. No doubt, her mother's heart must have

broken with memories; yet their poignancy was tempered with hope and courage drawn from the thought of her Crucified Saviour, and from the knowledge that her boy had often knelt at the Communion rail and must have been spiritually prepared for any emergency, even the quick violence of so fatal an accident. This was the message implicit in that mother's look at the bedside which, when noisier experiences have long since faded beyond recall, remains an inspiration.

### AN INSPIRATION INDEED

A man may inherit the Faith at birth, have its answers impressed upon him as a child by his own good mother, hear its doctrines all through his youth from the pulpits of his diocese, and, in fact, never know a serious intellectual obstacle to his assent—but this was one of those lightning reminders that rouse the soul to what has so easily been taken for granted. It was worth a dozen books on apologetics.

And such reminders can be had for the simple price of keeping one's eyes open. Daily life is full of them. After all, that valiant woman saying her rosary at her son's bedside is typical of the millions who meet the challenge of death with a firm belief in its utter inability to destroy the Communion of Saints. Death can destroy nothing at all of the Faith. Its opportunity

has passed. Having had the Founder of the Faith in His grave, it could not keep Him there: proof irrefutable that He is mightier than death, and must be God, and that consequently what He taught mankind of the world hereafter is true. This it was—her confidence in the supreme miracle of Easter—that fortified the dying boy's mother. It was her guarantee that, in losing her son to death, she was only losing him to life eternal; and that nothing but the loss of grace, the grace in which she meant to persevere, could prevent an endless reunion between the two. Death held no sorrow for her which her faith could not assuage and turn into the divine disdain of Saint Paul: "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

Confronted by the inevitability of death, to whom can we turn if not to our risen Saviour? None other has broken its tyranny; none other has even claimed, still less proved, that mastery. Without faith in Him, life becomes a joyless boredom, a meaningless riddle, a jigsaw puzzle the central piece of which is hopelessly missing. With that faith, not a tribulation known to our war-ridden generation but may catch the reflected splendor from His own agony on the cross which ended in that stupendous triumph of the Resurrection.

Really, what would suffering humanity do without the Christ of its hopes? Even those not altogether certain of Him, as soon as dire misfortune strikes, warm to Him with the naturalness of a flower's thirst for the sun. As in the days when the heart-weary, the lame and the sick lined Judea's roads to await the touch of His hand, and crowds flocked upon the Galilean hills to hear the unearthly beauty of His wisdom, so in our atomic age multitudes are yearning through their anxieties for that same adorable Presence. What a tragedy, incomparably worse than atomic ruin itself, that so many of these have not known where to look for the perfect fulfillment of their yearning desire!

### THE BLESSED SACRAMENT REMAINS

With those who believe in the Blessed Sacrament, it is different. They know. For every sorrow that death lays upon them, there waits in some tabernacle not far from their home the same approachable Christ to sanctify their bereavement with the infinite wealth of His sympathy. At any hour of the day they may visit Him; in the peaceful twilight of their parish church they may talk to Him, their faces brightened by the glow of His lamp, their minds filling with reassurance that this is He who rose from

the tomb to prove once and for all the helplessness of death.

They will return unafraid to routine, having left their fears in the tabernacle. They will go strengthened in the conviction that mothers like the one I have mentioned can now put joy into their very sobs, because a Mother's heart broke at the foot of the cross, nineteen hundred years ago, when death was rendered — for such as that boy of the accident — the gateway home. These privileged souls will walk, not bowed by the cruelty of the times, but erect in the certainty that, come what may, there will always have been the Resurrection, and that not even the most dreadful atomic blast can harm the man or woman, the boy or girl, whom it finds secure in the love of Jesus.

The beautiful words uttered at the tomb of Lazarus still hold. Their Divine Author has never retracted them. They are the eternal truth: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, even if he die, shall live; and whoever lives and believes in Me, shall never die."

**EXCERPTS FROM THE  
LITURGY OF EASTERTIDE**

## FROM THE MASS ON EASTER

*Oration:* O God who on this day, through Thine only-begotten Son, hast overcome death and opened unto us the Gate of Eternity; even as by Thy grace Thou dost inspire our desires, so also support them with Thy continual help. Through the same Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in union with the Holy Ghost, now and forever. Amen.

*Secret:* Receive, we implore Thee, O Lord, the prayers of Thy people, together with our offering of sacrifice; so that what we have begun on this feast of Easter may by Thy grace become a healing remedy unto life everlasting. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in union with the Holy Ghost, now and forever. Amen.

*Postcommunion:* Pour forth upon us, O Lord, the spirit of Thy love, and in Thy goodness make us to be of one mind and heart, whom Thou hast fed upon Thy Easter Sacrament. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in union with the Holy Ghost, now and forever. Amen.

A HOMILY FROM THE OFFICE OF  
EASTER DAY

BY

POPE SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT

*Text: "And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, brought spices, that they might go and anoint Him." — MARK: 16:1*

Dearly beloved brethren, you have just heard of the holy women who followed the Lord: that they brought sweet spices to His sepulchre, and, having loved Him while He was yet alive, followed Him with devoted tenderness still. But their deed ought to serve as a lesson of piety and edification to the whole Church. It is our duty to heed what they did so that, in the light of their example, we may imitate them. This we shall do — namely, seek the Lord — if we live in virtue. We who believe in the Crucified as did they who brought to His sepulchre sweet spices, can achieve the equivalent by offering Him the fragrance of our good works.

A HOMILY FROM THE OFFICE OF  
EASTER TUESDAY

BY

SAINT AMBROSE, BISHOP OF MILAN

*Text: "Now while they were talking of these things, Jesus stood in their midst, and said to them, 'Peace to you! It is I, do not be afraid.' " — LUKE 24:36*

We see here the marvelous nature of the Lord's glorified Body. It could enter unseen, and then become seen. It could easily be touched, but its nature is difficult to understand. The disciples were afraid, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And therefore the Lord, in order to show us the evidence of His Resurrection, said: "Why are you disturbed, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and feet, that it is I Myself. Feel Me and see; for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." — LUKE 24:38-39

Therefore it was not in a disembodied state, but in the full though mysterious reality of His risen and glorified Body that He had passed through closed doors. Needless to add, that which is touched or handled is a body.

THE HYMN FROM LAUDS ON THE OCTAVE  
OF EASTER

(AS TRANSLATED BY REV. E. CASWALL)

The dawn was redd'ning in the sky,  
With "Alleluias" rang the air;  
Earth held a glorious jubilee,  
Hell gnashed its teeth in fierce despair:

When our most valiant, mighty King  
From death's abyss in dread array  
Led the long-prisoned Fathers forth  
Into the beam of light and day:

When He whom stone, and seal, and guard  
Had safely to the tomb consigned  
Triumphant rose and buried death  
Deep in the grave He left behind:

"Calm all your grief and still your tears,"  
Hark, the descending angel cries,  
"For Christ is risen from the dead,  
And death is slain, no more to rise."

O Jesus, from the death of sin  
Keep us, we pray; so shall Thou be  
The everlasting Paschal joy  
Of all the souls new-born in Thee.

Now to the Father, and the Son  
Who rose from death, be glory given;  
With Thee, O Holy Comforter!  
Henceforth by all in earth and heaven.

Amen.

THE GOSPEL FROM THE MASS  
ON THE OCTAVE OF EASTER

JOHN 20:19-31

When it was late that same day, the first of the week, though the doors where the disciples gathered had been closed for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, "Peace be to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." When He had said this, He breathed upon them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days, His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being closed, and stood in their midst, and said, "Peace be to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Bring here thy finger, and see My hands; and bring here thy hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and

my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed."

Many other signs also Jesus worked in the sight of His disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

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